



Colombian Caravana
59-60 Russell Square
London, WC1B 4HR
United Kingdom

Juan Manuel Santos Calderón
President of the Republic of Colombia
Carrera 8 No. 7 – 26
Palacio de Nariño
Bogotá
Colombia

15 August 2013

Dear President Santos,

Death threats against organisations and individuals, including lawyer José Humberto Torres of the CSPP and José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (Cajar)

I am writing to you on behalf of the UK members of the International Caravana of Jurists. During visits to Colombia in 2008, 2010 and 2012, we called upon the Colombian Government to protect lawyers' ability to represent their clients and to refrain from any interference in their work in order to comply with Colombian legislation, and International Law.

Our members are extremely concerned about recent death threats sent on August 4, 2013, by the Colombian paramilitary group "Los Rastrojos", to a number of organisations and individuals in Colombia, including human rights lawyers.

The threat states that these human rights defenders are military targets, because they allegedly have links with the guerrilla and are hampering the peace process, and the work of mining companies in Colombia. We are concerned that these threats may translate into action, as human rights defenders, including trade unionists and lawyers, are frequently attacked and often killed in Colombia while carrying out their legitimate work, as a result of threats such as this one.

The Colombian Caravana UK Lawyers Group is particularly concerned about the inclusion in this threat of lawyer José Humberto Torres, from the human rights organisation the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (CSPP) and the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers' Collective (Cajar). According to figures from the Attorney General's Office, over 400 lawyers have been killed in Colombia since 2002.

The work of human rights lawyers is vital to any peace process, and their important work to uphold the right to access justice, should be publicly recognised. I respectfully remind you of Articles 17 and 18 of the **UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers (1990)**.¹

¹ 16. Governments shall ensure that lawyers (a) are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference; ... and (c) shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognized professional duties, standards and ethics.



We consider that it is vital for the rule of law and the access to justice in Colombia that the current climate of threats against these human rights lawyers is urgently addressed.

Because of the extremely serious nature of this situation, we ask that you:

- publicly express your support for the legitimate work of human rights lawyers and reject these threats against them
- take concrete steps to ensure that the Colombian State fully and impartially investigates and that the perpetrators are brought to justice
- take concrete steps to ensure that all paramilitary structures are dismantled in Colombia

We will continue to monitor the progress of the investigation into this case and those of other lawyers who have been threatened and murdered in Colombia. We also ask that we be kept updated, with reference to our specific enquiries, with respect to the extent of progress in investigating the above crime and bringing those responsible to justice.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sara Chandler
Chair, Colombian Caravana UK Lawyers Group

cc:

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|---|--|
| - La Fiscalía General de la Nación
Comite Ejecutivo de la Abogacia
Colombiana | - Sarah Smith, Law Society of England
and Wales |
| - Vice-Presidente Angelino Garzón | - Gabriela Carina Knul de Albuquerque
e Silva, Relatora Especial de las
Naciones Unidas sobre la
independencia de magistrados y
abogados |
| - Daniel Ricardo Silva, Human Rights and
Environmental Attache, Embassy of
Colombia, London | - Margaret Sekaggya, Relator Especial
de las Naciones Unidas: sobre la
situación de los defensores de
derechos humanos |
| - Abogados por Abogados | |
| - Abogados Sin Fronteras Canadá | |
| - Asociación Colombiana de Abogados
de Derechos Humanos (ACADEHUM) | |

17. Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities